

This section of the EIR describes the existing visual resources within San Luis Obispo County, identifies regulations in place to protect resources, and discusses the impacts to aesthetics and visual resources associated with implementation of the COSE Consolidation and Update. The analysis focuses on any anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics and potential visual resource impacts.

3.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

The County of San Luis Obispo is characterized by rolling hills, the Pacific Ocean coastline, scenic roadways, and agricultural and open spaces (including meadows, riparian corridors, wetland areas, and forests). Its traditional rural and agricultural built environments also define the visual character of the county. The existing visual resource setting is described in Chapter 9 and Appendix 9 of the COSE, incorporated here by reference.

3.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

Applicable federal, state, and local regulations that apply to aesthetic and visual resources within the County of San Luis Obispo are identified below. These regulations are described in detail in Appendix 9 of the COSE.

FEDERAL REGULATIONS

- National Scenic Byways Program

STATE REGULATIONS

- California State Scenic Highways Program

LOCAL REGULATIONS

- General Plan
 - Area Plans
 - Sensitive Resource Areas (SRA)
- Local Coastal Program
- Land Use Ordinance and Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance
- Highway Corridor Design Standards (HCDS)
- Community Design Plans

3.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

An aesthetic or visual resources impact is considered significant if implementation of the COSE Consolidation and Update would result in any of the following (based on State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G):

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;

3.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

- b) Substantially affect scenic resources or scenic views, including trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings within a State Scenic Highway, designated County Scenic Roadway, Scenic River Corridor, roadway eligible for listing as a scenic roadway/highway or other public vantage point or scenic vista locally known for its scenic qualities;
- c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the county; or,
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views within the county.

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource analysis is based on review of topographic conditions and an assessment of the San Luis Obispo County COSE Consolidation and Update. This analysis recognizes the programmatic nature of the project and focuses on the potential implications of the proposed policies of the COSE.

For the purposed of this analysis, a *scenic vista* is defined as a view of natural environmental, historic, and/or architectural features possessing visual and aesthetic qualities of value to the community. The term "vista" generally implies an expansive view, usually from an elevated point or open area.

The reader is directed to **Section 4.0** (Cumulative and Growth Inducing Impacts) of this EIR for analysis of cumulative aesthetic impacts.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Implementation of the proposed COSE Consolidation and Update will not introduce new sources of light and glare. Therefore, **no impacts** to daytime or nighttime views within the county are expected and this issue will not be addressed further.

Alteration of Scenic Vistas, Resources, and Visual Character

Impact-3.1-1 Implementation of the proposed COSE Consolidation and Update would add greater protection and preservation of San Luis Obispo County's scenic resources by requiring land use restrictions, design guidelines, and discretionary project review consistent with, and more stringent than, plans programs and policies currently adopted by the County. Therefore, this is considered a **Class IV, beneficial impact**.

Existing goals and policies dispersed throughout the various elements and land use ordinances aim to protect visual resources through land use restrictions, design guidelines, and discretionary project review. The proposed update to the COSE includes a specific Visual Resources chapter consisting of goals, policies, and implementation measures consolidated from existing documents and new policies to more strictly direct future development, reduce sprawl, and reflect the County's strategic growth planning goals including:

Goal VR1 and associated policies and implementation strategies would preserve the natural and agricultural landscape views in rural areas through development and adoption of scenic protection standards.

Goal VR2 and associated policies and implementation strategies identify and protect the natural and historic character and identity of rural areas through design review and revision and strengthening of the Countywide Design Guidelines.

Goal VR3 and associated policies and implementation strategies would preserve the visual identities of communities by maintaining community separators between cities and communities. Policies include distinction between rural areas, preservation of rural character and open space, conservation tools and community involvement.

Goal VR4 and associated policies and implementation strategies identify and protect distinct visual resources within scenic corridors. **Policy VR4.1**, stated previously in the Agriculture (AGP30b1) and Open Space (OSP25a1) requires that the County designate scenic corridors based on the recommendations for Scenic Corridor Studies. **Policy VR4.2** requires the balanced protection of scenic resources with the protection of biological resources and agricultural resources that may co-exist within the scenic corridor.

Goal VR5 and associated policies and implementation strategies protect views from scenic vistas and vista points.

Because the policies and programs of the proposed COSE will strengthen existing scenic resource policies and because the policies have been specifically designed to avoid, or strategically locate visually objectionable development and enhance the aesthetics of county lands, implementation of the proposed COSE Consolidation and Update will result in a beneficial impact to aesthetic and visual resources.